

## Bee County cancels voting at senior citizen centers

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Bee County commissioners have voted to remove early voting stations from senior citizen centers after receiving a report that an elderly man was told he must vote a straight Democratic ticket to receive food.

The report is the latest in a series of allegations of voter fraud lodged by Republicans in the heavily Democratic South Texas county. Republicans also are warily eyeing what they say is an extraordinarily high number of absentee ballots requested by mail for elderly or sick voters - including 400 from one precinct alone.

Under state law, voters who are elderly, infirm or planning to be out of town on Election Day may request ballots by mail, fill them out and return them. In Bee County, 1,000 such absentee ballots have been requested, according to County Attorney Jose **Aliseda**, a Democrat-turned-Republican who is seeking re-election.

Two years ago, fewer than 7,000 voters cast ballots countywide, records show.

Bee County commissioners had voted to place mobile voting stations in senior activity centers where federal food commodities are distributed. Because of the complaint, commissioners have decided to cancel mobile voting.

**Aliseda** said an elderly man called him to complain.

"He said he and his friends had been approached by a worker of Bee County

Community Action Agency, telling them that their commodities were contingent upon their voting a straight Democratic ticket," **Aliseda** said.

"These are people who don't know better most of the time. He knew it was a bogus threat, but he was concerned that his friends and others were being manipulated that way."

**Aliseda** said that if he wins re-election, he will begin an investigation into possible voter fraud.

It wouldn't be the first such investigation.

In 1987, a Bee County grand jury investigated possible voter fraud resulting from the 1986 election, but no action was taken. In 1990, two Bee County residents were found guilty of illegal assistance to a voter. Both were fined and given probated sentences.

Bee County Republican Party Chairman Dan Ouellette said such allegations "are not uncommon south of San Antonio."

"This type of voting fraud and this type of intimidation is going on everywhere," Ouellette said.

Pat Sugarek, chairwoman of the Bee County Democratic Party, said she has seen no evidence that anyone made food contingent upon votes.

"I haven't heard any more about it," she said.

"I have my doubts. I think that's just kind of the way the Republicans are - they're kind of jumpy."

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